

Fill Out the Hunter Survey; It's the Right Thing To Do!

If you receive a survey in the mail from the California Department of Fish and Game, don't throw it away! The future of hunting could depend on your participation!

Okay, that may be overstating our case just a bit. But it is true that the DFG depends on information from its annual Game Take Hunter Survey because it is the Department's *only* source for harvest information for many game species. Successful big game hunters are required to mail their tags to the Department, but there is no equivalent method of reporting success among upland game bird hunters.

The DFG has been conducting the annual game take hunter survey for more than 30 years. It's been a reliable way of estimating how much effort the average hunter has to exert to harvest his/her game, and how successful he/she was during the season. This information, combined with population surveys, helps managers set seasons and bag limits that make for an enjoyable hunt without over-harvesting the state's game birds. This information is also of critical importance in the DFG's environmental documents addressing hunting of upland game.

In recent years, however, the random survey seems to be getting lost in the barrage of junk mail that inundates us all. Hunters simply aren't returning the surveys the way they used to. The Department has been persistent about mailing surveys again and again to those who don't respond the first time, but with disappointing results. Mailing costs go up, and the survey response rate continues to decline.

Last January the DFG sent survey forms to 19,000 randomly-selected hunters—approximately six percent of the state's total population of licensed hunters. Responses trickled in. Several months later, the DFG mailed the survey again to those who did not reply. Again, the response was underwhelming. Those who still didn't respond received a third survey form in the mail in June. Despite the repeated mailings, only about half of the recipients responded—three percent of the total hunting population.

Generally speaking, the smaller the sample size, the less reliable the data. Survey professionals call this "non-response bias" and it works like this: People are more likely to respond to a survey if they have information they're eager to share. In this case, successful hunters are more likely to respond than those who either didn't hunt or weren't successful.

If you receive a survey form this year, please: fill it out and send it back! Even if you did not hunt, or didn't harvest any of the species listed on the survey, it is important that you complete and return the form.

When you do return it, please don't tear off the serial number; it allows to DFG to electronically track who responded and who didn't. The survey information (including names and addresses) is *never* sold or given away, so survey respondents don't need to worry about privacy issues.



"Uncle Buck"
Illustration by Jeremy Taylor.

In the past, some survey respondents have hand-written the following complaint: "I already gave you this information when I bought my hunting license. Why are you asking for it again?" Hunters are probably referring to a survey conducted by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that is attached to the hunting license application. That information focuses on migratory bird species only; it doesn't include questions about resident game bird species and hunter effort.

If you receive a survey form in the mail, please complete it and return it as soon as possible. This will help to ensure your name is taken off of the list for the follow-up mailing. If you have any specific questions about the survey, you can contact DFG biologist Sam Blankenship at (916) 653-1759.

A final report is prepared each year for the previous year's harvest data. The report is available to the public, and can be accessed on the DFG's internet web page at <http://www.dfg.ca.gov>. ♡